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ABSTRACT

A booklet of poems written by Indian children in Ontario and Northern Quebec, Canada, is printed for sharing with everyone. The educational background of the contributors ranges from children attending large schools in or near urban areas to children attending 1-room schools in the northern bush. For some of these children, English is the only language; for others, English is a second language. The booklet is divided into four sections covering the following concepts: Who Am I? Where Am I?, What Am I?, and Why Am I? (DB)

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WHO AM I ?

The Poetry of Indian Children

July, 1969

Education Division
Indian Affairs
1849 Yonge St.
Toronto 7, Canada

FOREWORD

The poems in this book were written by Indian children in Ontario and Northern Quebec. Some are from large schools, so close to cities as to be almost urban; some come from tiny one-room schools deep in the northern bush. Some were produced by children whose only language is English; some come from children whose mother tongue is Cree or Ojibway, and who have only recently learned English as a second language.

We regret that we do not have a complete list of all the teachers in whose classrooms these poems were developed. We commend them, however, for their sensitivity in collecting the work, and thank them for being willing to share it with us all.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY
SAUL WILLIAMS & DANIEL CHIKANE
ROUND LAKE

Miss M. Young
Indian Affairs
Toronto

WHO AM I

The Poetry of Indian Children

O GREAT SPIRIT

O Great Spirit! if only you took me back
Back to the time of our ancestors,
Back, it's the time when our forefathers
learned medicines of magic,
When they lived in teepees,
Grew up and became expert huntsmen
and men of bravery.
O Great Spirit, if only I knew all the
ways of our forefathers;
If only you could teach me,
Then I too would teach my people
of their ways long forgotten.
O Great Spirit! it is sad to think
of how we dulled our lives
With our forgotten skills.
If only I was to know the ways of our gods
then I would help my people in all ways.
It is sad to think of all these things.
O Great Spirit!

Kenneth Pitawanakwat – Age 15
Wikwemikong

THE OLD HOUSE

There is that old shaggy house,
Without a standing door,
Not even has it a proper floor
For a little brown mouse
To scurry about on.

SKELETON

The skeleton is standing there,
So straight and tall;
Against the purple wall,
And bones is all he wears.

Valerie Elaine Dokis - Age 11
Dokis

HOME

When I get home after school
It is always noisy and loud;
But when I stay home or baby sit
Everything is all quiet and nice;
All the children are sitting
Because I am there.
But when Mother gets home,
Everything is all the same
As in the beginning –
Noisy!

Wendy Kitchikeg – Age 14
Wikwemikong

THE SCARECROW

I just hate this!
Every day standing in the sun
All day long –
And why do these crows stand on me?
Why don't they stand somewhere else
For a change?
All they do
Is just picking straws
That are sticking out of me;
I wonder what is so good
About that straw?

Janet Dokis – Age 13
Dokis

OUR ATTIC WINDOW

Of all the windows in our house
I like the attic window best,
Because it's high and round and small
And it's so different from the rest.
From every single way you look
It seems you look at a picture book;
From it you can see a stream of water
Running down the walk way,
And you can see the clear, blue sky,
And the birds flying high.
At night you can see millions of stars,
And listen to the honking noise
Of passing cars;
In the morning, a bird sings
On your window pane;
So much you can see
Out of the attic window,
And that's why I think it's the best.

Betty Lou Rankin – Age 14
Goulais Bay

SKIPPING IS FUN

Here we come,
Skipping along,
All the way
On the sidewalk,
Then we skip home!

We went dancing,
We went prancing,
All the way on,
That is what fun is!

Verna M. Lewis – Age 9
Kaboni

WHERE AM I

I DREAM OF THE WILDERNESS

Oh how I would love to see
The wilderness beyond;
Maybe I will some day.
I will see a bird so sweet,
The deer with a leap in every move,
The squirrel with a nut in its mouth,
Perhaps a racoon or two,
But certainly not a grizzly bear, nor wolf.
I would love to smell the flower
And the forest green.
I would love to go a-wondering
Through the forests and the fields,
But now I just have a dream.

James Recollet – Age 13
Wikwemikong

I SEE AND I HEAR

I see a cloud in the clear, blue sky;
It seems so alone, so small, and so far,
And as I watch, it gets smaller and smaller;
I guess that's because the winds blow it further.

I see a man on a lonely road;
He walks all alone for a little way,
Then meets another, alone like he,
And walks with him, for a littler way.

I see the trees of a distant land;
They're mostly green, with specks of white.
The land is so big, and yet it is so quiet,
Except for the winds
That blow through the trees,
In a distant land.

Margaret Pitawanakwat – Age 15
Wikwemikong

AUTUMN WOODS

I like to walk in the Autumn woods;
I hear the birds,
I see the squirrels and the deer
Run about the fields
All day.

It's fun to watch the chipmunk
Run around the trees,
And pounce upon
The great puff ball,
Here and there.

But when the sun goes down,
There is stillness in the air;
Then all of a sudden
The jaybird screams
Aloud.

That fills the air
For miles around;
Then I know
It is surely Autumn
Once Again.

Mike Isaacs – Gr. 7
Six Nations

SOMETHING ON A COLD, DARK NIGHT

The sun was coming down
And it is cold
The black bird flies
It is getting dark
The tree flew
The man is cold
The deer ran away
The blackbird has wing
The cold flew and flew
The man is scared
The wind flew all the time.

Aylmer Rae – Age 7
Deer Lake

AUTUMN FEELINGS

What is Autumn?
Autumn to me is –
A happy, colourful, gay feeling;
It is like walking through a forest
Smelling the autumn freshness
Go right down inside you
And touch the softness
In your heart.

The chill of autumn drops
In a mist of white silk;
Leaves drop in clusters
Of coloured pictures,
Birds sing, cry and honk
As they make their way
Through the clouds;
Maybe this little taste of autumn
Will bring happiness to you
As it did to me.

Robert Burnham – Gr. 8
Six Nations

THE SNOWSTORM

The snowstorm is a cloud
of strong, hard snow
like needles
Hitting me on the face.

Grade Three
Eastmain, P.Q.

A WINTER DAY

The sun is shining
In the blue sky;
White snow falls gracefully
On the green trees,
Where it lies.

Valerie Elaine Dokis – 11
Dokis

AUTUMN LEAVES

A lonely sound of dead, crisp leaves rustling,
Accents the sight of topless, unbearing trees;
Perhaps if I shut my eyes, it will go away.
But no!
The barren sight has made its way to my mind.

The ploughing of the fields has taken away much of the green
Behind their long, willowy arms, the forests look dark,
Holding only gloom and dismay;
Plants with their undying attempt to live
Wither under dark skies and cold winds;
Beautiful flowers no longer linger along garden walls.

May it all end
Then beauty shall take its place again.

Verna Montour – Gr. 8
Six Nations

NIGHT

Night is such a pretty sight,
When the lights go off and on,
And the stars bright with light
Shine until the coming dawn.

Cheryl Taylor – Gr. 4
Curve Lake

RAIN

I like the rain
It makes things grow;
It will help the grain,
It will, I know.

Wanita Taylor – Gr. 4
Curve Lake

SOUNDS

Do you ever wonder
About the sounds you hear?
Some of them are nice . . .
Like the sound of
Happy children playing,
Someone singing,
And a crack of a hunter's gun,
And sound of geese flying high
In the sky,
Longing for a place to rest, and eat;
And the splashing sound of water,
And the birds singing a merry tune.

Sammy Achneepineskum
Fort Albany

ANONYMOUS CITY

I walk the streets –
Busy, noisy, crowded.

I walk;
People pass by
I've never seen before,
And will never see again.

Like you look in the sky,
Look at the clouds pass by,
You only see the shape
Of the clouds
Once
And never shall you see it again.

You feel alone
With so many strangers.
You don't care who they are
And neither do they.

Sammy Achneepineskum
Fort Albany

SUMMER AND WINTER

People sliding and skipping,
The rivers are frozen;
When the birds are hiding
Good-bye for the winter!
Here comes spring!

Janice Oakes – Gr. 4
St. Regis

HOME

It's cold,
It's frosty,
But in the house
It's cosy.

Tommy Maracle – Age 7
Tyendinaga

THE LITTLE STARS

As darkness falls, the birds and the flowers shut their eyes,
But the wonder of the stars brights up the darkness;
They seem like diamonds twinkling up above,
Filling the wide open spaces as you gaze at the stars.

It seems to greet you and tell you
That it will watch over you while you sleep;
As daylight breaks I'll still be here,
But you can't see me for the sun shines bright and near.

Linda Marie Montour – Gr. 4
St. Regis

WHAT AM I

SPEED

The birds can sing and the birds can fly,
Over the treetops, into the sky;
They like to fly like the powered planes,
And in the sky they both look the same.

The only thing wrong is the plane is fast,
And that is why birds come last;
But the bird can sing, and the plane can't sing,
And that is why speed isn't everything.

Lloyd William Noganosh – Age 11
Lower French

SNAKES

When I think of snakes, I think about them
twisting,
curling,
going round my legs,
getting tighter and tighter
and never letting go.

Grade Three
Eastmain, P.Q.

THE LITTLE BEAR

The little bear lives in the woods,
He hides in the woods;
And the bear was dark,
He was fat and big,
And he saw a little rabbit
Running away,
And the bear saved all

Bonnie Mekis – Age 8
Deer Lake

WEASEL

There ran a weasel under the snow,
There were trees all around,
Then the weasel acted clumsy,
Like a clown;
Then he went.
Where?
I do not know.

Robert Dokis – Age 14
Dokis

DEER

One day the deer is drinking
At the lake.
The sun go down,
The day is dark.
Some one talk to the deer,
She said, "Good night deer."
The deer ran to the woods,
It was a cold night,
The deer is very cold.
Next day in the morning
The snow was falling down.

Amos Rae – Age 8
Deer Lake

MY BEAUTIFUL HORSES

My beautiful horses were still on the hill,
~~Looking toward the mountain side,~~
There where the cowboys usually ride,
They stood so quiet – so very still.

Sharon Restoule – Age 13
Dokis

WHY AM I

MY SWING

When on my swing I can go high into the air,
And the world jumps with joy;
Everything seems to bounce and laugh with delight,
And everything seems to be kind
And whistles and sings.
Love seems to be everywhere.

But when the swing slows down,
Life seems to die away;
Love turns to hate;
Boys throw stones at birds and squirrels.
I wonder,
"Is it ever like that in heaven?"

– Tony Roote
Scotch Settlement

WAR

War is for dauntless people,
For whom fighting is a dare,
Who wish it would never end.
But peoples' lives are at stake,
Because of this, innocent human beings die.
War changes their lives completely.
If I had my way,
I would want them safer,
Instead of thinking only of myself.

Patrick Recollet – Age 17
Wikwemikong

SOMEWHERE

Beyond reality
And into a world so divinely unique
No man can imagine,
I have been.

A place where the sun
Constantly casts coloured rays,
Bringing warmth and happiness
To all the beautiful people.

Rather than hopes, tears, worries,
Misunderstanding and misery,
Complete happiness exists;
It is yours now.
Come with me,
For I am the Angel of Death.

Brenda Fisher – Age 18
Wikwemikong

A PRAYER

O God, why do you let this destruction happen?
Why do you let innocent people die?
Why can't you stop all of this,
And make this world a happy place to live?

Sometimes I never think you exist,
But other times I do;
People are born and die in streets,
Why don't you stop it? eah! eah!

Lester Manitowabi – Age 15
Wikwemikong

BRAVE, STRONG, WEAK OR SHY

I have a friend
Who's shy and timid;
I have an enemy
Who's brave and strong.

But for me,
I'm in between,
Neither shy nor timid,
Brave nor strong.

I'm satisfied with what I am.

Zoe Enosse – Age 14
Wikwemikong

LITTLE SNAKE

Once there was a boy named Little Snake.
He was born in the village
Where there are not much people.
He got no parents
He didn't know what to do,
But he got a friend
But this friend was bad
So Little Snake became bad.

Oh Little Snake don't you be bad
Be my friend
So I'll take care of you
And I'll give you anything you want,
And be my baby.

Little Snake, Little Snake
Went to steal some bananas
They didn't know what to do,
They call the police,
And they tell him who did it.
He went to take Little Snake
He put him in jail for a week.
Little Snake got out of jail
And became good.
His friend will be in jail
For ten years.

John Moonias – Age 12
Lansdowne House

SOMEBODY IS TEASING ME

My eyes are very hot,
They have tears in them;
My face feels red like it does
    when I wash it
    and the water is too hot;
I am breathing fast and I feel
    tight inside.

Grade Three
Eastmain, P.Q.

CHRISTMAS MORNING

I am shaking inside
  like a tree when the wind blows
  just a little bit hard;
I am breathing hard like I do
  after I run fast;
My heart is bumping like train wheels
  I am happy!

SECRET CAVES

When I go in secret caves
I like to look for things;
i found a rock I want to save,
And I saw a bird with funny wings.

Peter Restoule – Age 11
Dokis